The Bassi

782 This is the noble form of the Sou Khouan. It is not necessary to choose a day or a moment for its celebration. The Bassi greets the passing traveler to wish him welcome or a good journey on his departure. This is the typical Laotian ceremony.

Birth

843 Rites de passage. Van Gennep has defined under this name all the prohibitions and ceremonies which the pregnant woman, and one who has given birth, must observe in order to protect herself and her child from harmful influences. In Laos these prohibitions are strictly observed.

During Pregnancy. The woman must follow a certain number of observances in order to avoid the death of the [52] fetus. She must not eat partially hatched eggs, nor larvae of bees for she would make the child wicked like insects. She must not drink hot drinks for the child would be bald, etc. She must not step over a hollow oven for the child would have a harelip, nor over a horse's tether for the child would be a glutton; she must not paint her face for she would make the child frivolous, etc.

Before Delivery. These practices become stricter before her confinement, and others are added to them. The woman about to give birth must not eat round, hard-skinned eggplants, nor sugar cane, for the water bag would break with difficulty. The disorders of taste are due to the desires of the fetus, so these must be satisfied unless the desired dishes are forbidden. She must wear her skirt in such a way that the belt is always at the same height, for otherwise the child would not present itself well. She must not stand in the opening of a doorway, nor sit on a mortar for pounding rice, nor eat rice directly from the pot, for the progression of the fetus would be hindered at the time of birth.

There are also other beliefs. Wearing red garments would bring on hemorrhages, lying on one's back would risk making the placenta adhere, and it would become loose at the time of delivery only with great difficulty. Finally, to visit a woman in childbed might bring on a miscarriage, for the fetus might get the fancy to escape too soon.

When she awakes, the pregnant woman must strike her loins three times with her closed fists wishing at the same time that the placenta detach itself, and that the water bag break easily. In the evening, at the time of her daily bath, she should rub her belly with sand as she faces the setting sun in order to remove the layer of

sebaceous scum of the fetus and so make the birth easier. She should 843
wash her hair from time to time with water in which she has soaked
an eel's tail [53] and some rice. She takes hold of the eel's tail to
tie her hair. This will result in the head of the fetus becoming
more slippery, and the birth will become easier.

If the pregnant woman has to protect herself from spirits, it must 843
not be forgotten that certain of her actions may be disastrous to those 777
around her. She must not enter a new house for fear of attracting ill
fortune to its owner. She must not attend a wedding for she would
bring ill luck to the new couple. The husband of the pregnant woman
loses a part of his khouan (see above). He also becomes unfortunate
in hunting and in games of chance.

The Delivery. This cannot take place in the house of the 844
woman brought to bed, otherwise the greatest misfortune would
descend on the owner of the building. Sometimes the parents have
a cabin built where the woman giving birth will spend the whole time
of her delivery.

When the woman feels the first pains, all objects that are fastened
or hooked on, such as earrings, are removed. She keeps only her
skirt on and remains sitting during the whole time of her labor.
Opposite her hangs a cord to which she holds on at the moment of
birth, for this position will facilitate the descent of the fetus. If
the birth is prolonged, decoctions and liniments are used to help the
operation.

At the time of expulsion, the newly born is left between the
legs of its mother until the delivery. It is only when the placenta
has emerged, that the cord is cut with a bamboo blade. If it were
cut with a steel blade, the child would run the risk of meeting a
violent death. The thread used for tying the cord on girls is taken
from a spinning wheel, so that later she will become a good spinner.
The placenta is usually buried under one of the stairways of the house
[54] otherwise the fertility of the parents would run the risk of drying
up.

After the Delivery. After the delivery, the woman who 846
has given birth sits on a bed of finely pulverized kitchen salt, so that
the after effects may be normal. Than she takes a hot bath and
changes her clothes. After that begins for her the You Kam "to sub-
mit to penitence."

She lies down on a low bed placed against a large clay hearth
of the same size as the bed, on which is a large caldron used to pre-
pare a decoction of aromatic or medicinal plants to be put into the
sitz baths and hot body affusions which she must have frequently.